

ADORNING: OUTWARD OR INWARD?

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The following is by Ron Williams [Hephzibah House, 508 School St., Winona Lake, IN 46590. 574-269-2376]:

An earnest Christian man parks his car in the church parking lot, and silently prays for God to bless the upcoming Lord's Day services. He has been acutely aware of his fleshly lapses and spiritual failings during the past few days, and he is earnestly looking forward to fellowship with the consecrated believers of his flock, worshiping his Saviour and having his soul refreshed with godly music and the faithful preaching of the Word of God . . . he wants to enter into the upcoming services, not as a spectator, but to worship in spirit and in truth.

Within moments of entering the auditorium, he happens to see a young woman of the church of beautiful form and fair features who has chosen to dress in such a way that the design of her clothing and type of material reveal the contours of her body only her husband should see. The extremely close fit of her clothing serves to accentuate the movements of her body. Because she chose to wear a low neckline and short hem, her appearance becomes alluring and provocative to the vision of every man in the auditorium. The slit in her skirt reveals momentary sensual glimpses of her thigh with every step.

Now the Brother who sincerely came to seek the face of God, refresh his soul and worship his Saviour, finds himself in an unexpected battle with his flesh. His spirit seeks to avoid gazing at the Christian woman, whereas his lower nature wants to gaze upon her. He becomes so distracted in this conflict between his flesh and spirit that at the conclusion of the service, he feels soiled and defeated that he allowed his eyes to feed his lustful imaginations, and that he displeased his Saviour in so doing. His yearning anticipation of spiritual blessing in the worship service has unexpectedly ended in distraction and spiritual struggle.

A SCRIPTURAL SOLUTION

First Century Christians faced similar situations as the illustration above. Peter, explaining the effect of the "grace of God" (1 Peter 5:12) on believers, taught how that supernatural, enabling grace helps believers to rise above living "natural" lives, and to live supernatural lives; lives that are contrary to our flesh and to the ways of this world.

In that section of his epistle explaining how ladies must submit to lost husbands (1 Peter 3:1-6), he goes on to detail how ladies ought to "adorn" themselves (1 Peter 3:3-5). Just as a lady who follows her flesh will seek to assert leadership of her home, she will also adorn herself in the ways of this world. Natural and supernatural behavior are sharply contrasted in this portion. A woman utilizing the grace of God will be submissive even to a lost husband, and will dress in God-pleasing ways, whereas a woman failing of the grace of God will resist, supplant or ignore her husband's authority, and will dress in ways conforming to the values, fads and fashions of this present world.

"Adorning" comes from the Greek noun "cosmos;" a harmonious arrangement or order, the world or universe being divinely arranged. In its verb form, this word gives rise to the English word "cosmetic," and especially in its modern use, means to decorate or garnish. However, its Biblical sense is to arrange, or put in order (a divine order). Thus, the modern "cosmetics," while they do arrange in a certain order, are a corruption and a distortion of the idea of "adorning" if that "order" is not ordained of God.

CONTRASTING ADORNMENT

In 1 Peter 3:3-4, there is a *contrast* between fleshly, worldly adorning and the adorning which pleases God. This contrast is set in sharp relief by the prohibition "Let it not be" in 1 Peter 3:3, and the antithetical, positive command "let it be" in 1 Peter 3:4. Even more clarity is given to the reader by contrasting the *sphere* of adorning: "the *outward*" sphere in verse 3, as opposed to "the hidden man of the heart" (the *inner* sphere of man) in verse 4.

In other words, a woman failing of the grace of God (either a lost woman or a carnal woman), will primarily focus on *externals* (verse 3), whereas a godly woman, who utilizes the grace of God, will primarily focus on *internals* (verse 4).

A lost or carnal feminine heart finds pathetic and degrading emotional value in being the object of masculine attention and sensual gazing. This is a pitiful and debasing corruption of what God intended. Ostentatious, gaudy, immodest and brassy women are universally condemned in Scripture. That these undesirable traits are natural is demonstrated by Peter's negative order "let it not be" in verse 3. In other words, a feminine heart bereft of the grace of God will naturally focus on externals to some degree; some scandalously so, others to the norms of popular culture at that time. Peter is saying, "Do not do what is a natural inclination for your fallen nature as a woman."

UNIVERSAL TEMPTATION OF MEN

Every man has "eye" problems because he has "heart problems." Proverbs 27:20 says, "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied." Just as hell and destruction are voracious and insatiable, so are a man's eyes. They are the primary gateway of exciting his libido, and that is why Job said, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" in Job 31:1. He had no need of making a covenant with any other bodily mechanism because his eyes were the source of his temptation insofar as women were concerned. Though a man is fifteen or one hundred fifteen, he has "eye problems." Though physically incapable of committing acts of immorality, a man's eyes can bring sinful lust into his heart. It is understandable, with these Biblical truths in mind, how even godly David was tempted with regard to Bathsheba, *because of what he saw!*

That a man is *tempted* by sight is no excuse for him to think or act in a wrong way. By the grace of God and through self-control, he can and *must* resist this temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). How sad and incongruous that men coming to church services must resist looking at many Christian women who, either ignorantly or knowingly, by their dress have become a sensual object of temptation for the eyes of every man in the auditorium.

At what do most men of this world look when given the opportunity? Simply observe the eyes of men in public places where many people are coming and going. In such a public thoroughfare, notice the objects of their lustful and salacious gazing: women who are dressing and acting boldly and immodestly. Notice also that women who are dressed in clothing that is long, loose and layered (so as to conceal intimate contours and features of her body) receive little or no attention from those same lecherous men.

Any godly woman must candidly ask this personal question: "Why would I want men looking at me with lust in their hearts?" Unless you, for some perverted and pathetic reason, deliberately desire to be the object of men's lustful gazing, you must purpose to "adorn yourself in modest apparel, with *shamefacedness* and *sobriety*" (1 Timothy 2:9). "Shamefacedness" is a sense of shame and modesty that would prevent a good woman from ever defrauding a man and raising his carnal desires through her wrong dress and/or actions. "Sobriety" is that self-control of passions and desires that would prevent her from desiring to dress so as to attract the lustful eyes of men.

THE OUTWARD REVEALS THE INWARD

One cannot take the prohibitions of 1 Peter 3:3 *absolutely*; i.e., we can *never* plait hair, *never* wear gold, etc., because this would also mean we can never wear clothing! Again, the contrast of verses three and four explain the principle for us: emphasize *internal* godly character as opposed to shallow, corruptible and worldly *outward* features. Consequently, an insecure, worldly and carnal feminine heart concentrates on her *externals*, (dress, jewelry, fashions, cosmetics, etc.), whereas a godly woman attempts to focus primarily on the development of inner character qualities. To put it another way, the *externals* of a woman's life, whether godly or ungodly, reflect the state of her *internal*, or heart condition. When one sees a gaudy, provocative and immodest woman, she is revealing a shallow or non-existent spirituality within. When one sees a hard working, submissive and quiet-spirited woman who is modestly dressed, she is demonstrating or reflecting an inner godliness (1 Timothy 2:10).

How a woman acts and dresses reveals whether she is pleasing self (the one who concentrates on adorning the external), or whether she is attempting to please God (development of modesty, order and godly character is of high value to the Lord -- 1 Peter 3:4). Dressing and acting as a woman of this world will most assuredly rivet the persistent interest of lustful men, whereas adorning your heart and life with Christian graces and virtues merits the approving attention of a Holy God!

Note that Godly graces of the heart are "not corruptible" (1 Peter 3:4). In other words, a soul and its hard-earned virtues do not decay. Voluptuous and sensual sex objects of this world, no matter how beautiful, no matter how

alluring, will all undergo the corruption of death. Their beauty and sensuality will be quickly despoiled by the worms and decay of death. That which men view as an object of lust will corrupt and decay. That which God counts as valuable will live on through the ages. How foolish to spend concentrated, laborious hours in front of a mirror to gain a certain “look,” to spend vast sums of money on cosmetics and stylish clothing, to assiduously solicit the salacious gaze and desire of men, when it lasts for such a short time before it is corrupted? It is with good reason the king’s daughter is all glorious *within* (Psalm 45:13). “The King’s daughter” emphasizes her inner man, which with her redeemed soul pleases God into the ages, and does not cease with death.

Nothing is a more beautiful adornment to a Christian wife than a meek and quiet spirit. No deformity is more outrageous or unsightly than its reverse: a discontented, peevish, domineering and fretful spirit. As one man has said, “This latter spirit is hateful everywhere, it is nowhere more hateful than in a woman, in no woman so hateful as in a wife” (Proverbs 27:15, 25:24, 21:19).

How beautiful the wife who in the midst of the endless perplexing and frustrating details of her household and marriage, maintains an unruffled temper, and in Christian patience, possesses her soul!

Outward behavior reflects inner character of soul just as an external pulse represents an internal heartbeat. Dear Sister, when you adopt the fashions and fads of this world, you are demonstrating by your outward behavior, a leanness and anemia of soul. Moreover, if you possess a comely figure and fair features, you are also responsible for placing a stumbling block in front of every man who views your exposed and provocative figure. Is the degraded gratification you receive from the lustful stares of men worth being responsible for defrauding them, tempting them to lust, and debasing your own soul? This would be forsaking Divine approval and Heavenly reward for a mess of pottage.

The daughter of Sarah (1 Peter 3:6) will reject immodesty, no matter how popular with this world. Gaudiness, impropriety and boldness are shunned by her with the same determination as she would reject adultery. Modesty is *always* in style for godly, characterized women.

A daughter of Sarah would be horrified with shame to be the object of a man’s lust. Rather, she is seeking to please her Heavenly Father with her modest dress, quiet temperament and servant spirit.

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